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THE BEARINGS OF THE DARWINIAN THEORY OF EVOLUTION ON MORAL AND RELIGIOUS PROGRESS

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THE BEARINGS OF THE DARWINIAN THEORY OF EVOLUTION ON MORAL AND RELIGIOUS PROGRESS

'To the memory of Charles Robert Darwin, author of the "Origin of Species." . . . . . In early life a member of and a constant worshipper in this Church.' Thus runs the inscription on a mural tablet in the Unitarian Church in Shrewsbury; and it seems therefore appropriate that in this year, in which we celebrate the centenary of his birth, some reference should be made at the Annual Meeting of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association to the life and work of one of

the greatest of English thinkers, whose patient labours were destined to mark a new era in scientific thought and to revolutionize most branches of learning.

Nor does it seem strange to me that this Association should desire to celebrate the anniversary of the publication of the 'Origin of Species' by a lecture such as the one I have the honour to be invited to deliver. For though the Darwinian theory of evolution met with uncompromising opposition from many leaders of religious thought, there can never have been any real antagonism between the views set forth by Darwin and the belief held by the majority of Unitarians. Bound by no creed, and believing as we do that we are meant to use the faculties with which we

are endowed in the elucidation of truth, whether temporal or spiritual, we can always welcome the publication of a great work such as the 'Origin of Species' as a landmark in our progress towards the understanding of the wonders of Nature and the works of God.

Darwin's intense love of the truth, and his passionate desire to fathom the mysteries of Nature, which enabled him to triumph over his physical infirmities, evoke our admiration both for his personal character and for his far-reaching discoveries. Darwin's theory of evolution, the outcome of 'untiring industry in observing and collecting facts, and of unbounded patience in long reflecting' upon them, has not only stimulated all branches of biological and kindred sciences, but, as

has been rightly said, has 'created the scientific study of Religions.' It is therefore natural that a religious Association such as this should consider the bearings of the Darwinian theory of evolution upon the progress of morals and religion, which it has so much at heart. In undertaking as I have done with much diffidence, to place before you some of the features connected with the origin and growth of moral ideas and of religious thought, I do not wish to pose as an authority on either of these subjects, but rather to look at them from the biological standpoint, and to be mindful of the changes which the theory of evolution, like all human knowledge, has undergone during the last fifty years. That, I understand, was the

intention of your Committee in honouring me with an invitation to address you, and I trust that its confidence has not been misplaced, and that I may be able to say some things which may be helpful or encouraging to my audience.

It is now a matter of common knowledge that there were evolutionists before Darwin. Zeller and Haeckel in Germany, as well as Osborn in America, have drawn attention to the precursors of Darwin, particularly among the early Greek philosophers. Firm believers as many of these Empiricists were in the gradual evolution of living organisms, their views were often fanciful and grotesque, though they included some germs of the great truths which were enunciated two

thousand years later by Charles Darwin. Unfortunately the illuminating flashes of these Empiricists were doomed to extinction by the subsequent schools of philosophy, and by the acceptance by Christian divines and philosophers of the Jewish cosmogony, as recounted in the Book of Genesis.

There can be no doubt that the literal acceptance of this narrative of the creation not merely coloured but dominated the views of naturalists during the Christian era, and was mainly responsible for the prevalent idea of the fixity of species. Here and there a master mind, like that of Leibnitz at the beginning of the eighteenth century, stimulated by the apparent relationship of plant and animal forms, broke through the rigid

and artificial classification and hinted at a possibility of evolution or propounded a system of Natural Classification, based upon family resemblances.

It was however left to the great Frenchman, Lamarck, in 1809, the year of Darwin's birth, to formulate definitely a doctrine of evolution which, though not generally accepted, must have had some influence in preparing the scientific world for the acceptance of Darwin's more rational theory of evolution, which was based upon facts and observations that were singularly absent from Lamarck's speculations.

As is now well known Darwin was led to his theory of evolution in the first instance by observing during his voyage on the

'Beagle' certain facts in the distribution of plants and animals inhabiting South America, and in the geological relations of the present to the past inhabitants of that Continent. There were strong indications of a gradual divergence of forms and of a common descent of existing species from an ancestral stock; but Darwin was at a loss to explain how such differentiation of forms could be brought about. It was not until he had read Malthus's celebrated 'Essay on the Principle of Population' that it became clear to him that the key to his problem lay in the rapid power of multiplication possessed by animal and plant life. Even in the case of the least fertile forms the number of the offspring produced was far

greater than those actually arriving at maturity, the remainder perishing in the struggle with their foes or being killed by the adverse conditions of their surroundings.

If all organisms of a species were alike this struggle for existence would have no modifying effect; but it had long been known that a considerable amount of variation exists among organisms of the same kind, and Darwin's careful researches showed him that even in the case of offspring of the same parents, hardly any two individuals were exactly alike in all particulars. These innumerable variations in size and colour, in strength and vigour, would of necessity be brought into competition in the struggle for existence, and as a result some would sur-

vive to maturity while others would succumb before reaching that stage. Thus the weaker would be weeded out while the stronger would persist. This 'Survival of the Fit' in the struggle for existence Darwin termed 'Natural Selection.' It represents a force always at work, maintaining the different species of living organisms in a high state of efficiency.

But besides the variations fluctuating about the normal or average type, Darwin had observed the occurrence of variations arising apparently spontaneously, which differed in some essential feature or group of characters from the parents, and such organisms if they persisted in the 'struggle for existence' could give rise to a divergent

group such as Darwin had observed on his South American travels. The survival of such forms would depend in part on the fact of the new variation being a useful one. Harmful or even merely useless variations would tend to disappear more or less quickly. In the course of ages the conditions under which plants and animals exist have undoubtedly undergone considerable changes, and the organisms which were fit to survive in Palæozoic times are not those most fitted to the conditions of to-day. Thus it comes that with changing conditions we find one set of organisms disappearing and a differently constituted set taking their place. The species of to-day are therefore not identical with those of the past, but

differ widely from them. The animals of to-day were not created as such, but have been produced during the course of ages by an innumerable series of slight changes which have arisen from time to time.

These views, which very briefly sum up the most essential points of Darwin's theory of evolution, were not published by him until he had during twenty years of continuous labour collected endless facts in support of them, and critically examined the evidence he had accumulated. All this was worked up for publication in the 'Origin of Species,' though the year previously, with the generosity and modesty so characteristic of the great man he was, he agreed to publish a preliminary account of his theory at the

same time that Alfred Russel Wallace laid his views, at which he had arrived quite independently, before the Linnean Society.

It is almost impossible to estimate the wide-reaching effects of the publication of Darwin's theory of evolution. At first received with some caution, even in the fields of Botany and Zoology, it was later universally adopted as a satisfactory explanation of the gradual changes that must have taken place in the past in the moulding of the various forms of plant and animal life, and which are responsible for the present distribution of species.

From the domain of the Biological Sciences the evolutionary views spread almost immediately to all studies dealing with man

and his activities. In the fields of Sociology and Philology as well as in the more general study of Anthropology the conception of the gradual changes, which have taken place in the building up of our civilization, our customs, and our languages, has proved most fruitful not only towards a clearer understanding of existing conditions in the light of past history, but also on account of the stimulus it gave to further researches.

Even those fields of thought dealing with the study of morals and religion, over which at first the Darwinian theory seemed to cast a shadow of materialism and pessimism, have shown a rich harvest of learning produced by the stimulating light of an evolutionary view of the human mind.

At first the substitution of the selective force of nature for the creative hand of God in the origination of existing plants and animals came as a rude shock to those who believed in the literal accuracy of the Bible, but a broader view of the account of Jewish cosmogony prevailed and it was soon perceived how much more wonderful was the view of gradual evolution of man and the other animals along the orderly lines laid down by laws of variation and selection, than any belief in their special creation.

Nor does the sharp struggle for existence, which has left its indelible stamp on the whole nature of man, mean, as is sometimes thought, the ultimate dominance of the physical and intellectual superman,

for has it not produced in the course of centuries that noble array of men and women whose deeds and thoughts have been an inspiration to successive generations of mankind.

One might, it is true, be inclined to conclude, in view of the fact that the struggle for existence strengthens the feelings of self-preservation, that it might lead to the development of cruelty and selfishness, and that gentleness and altruism might be of such disadvantage to the individual, that persons possessing these qualities would gradually be weeded out of human society as unfit to survive. From the fact that this has not proved to be the case, it might be thought that possibly moral qualities

were not subject to the laws governing the physical and mental evolution of man. But one of the great merits of the Darwinian theory of evolution was its insistence on the universality of operation of natural laws, and in his 'Descent of Man' Darwin clearly shows that our moral nature has its beginning in certain instinctive characters of many animals, particularly in those instincts which make for the preservation of the race as distinct from that of the individual.

The altruistic impulses which undoubtedly exist in the animal kingdom have arisen in connexion with two phenomena :—

(1) The inability of the young of some of the higher animals to protect or even nourish themselves.

(2) The tendency among certain animals to live in flocks or herds.

In connexion with the first of these factors we know that the more complex organization of the higher animals has been accompanied in most cases by a reduction in the number of their offspring. In place of the thousands of eggs spawned by a fish, or the hundreds of tadpoles representing the descendants of a frog, birds and mammals produce comparatively few eggs or young, and the preservation of the race might be endangered, were it not that parental instincts have come into existence, which natural selection has carefully fostered. Those animals which guarded their eggs and protected and nourished their young were more likely to leave their off-

spring in a fit state to reach maturity than those in which no such habit existed, and thus parental love, one of the most beautiful of human virtues, may be considered to have its origin, as it has its counterpart, in the parental instincts of animals, in the bird that watches and feeds its fledgelings, and in the timid sheep defending its lamb against the attacks of its foes.

The second phenomenon of which we must take account is that in all groups of animals some of the physically weaker forms have survived in the struggle for existence by reason of a tendency they have exhibited, to remain united into families or flocks or herds. This gregarious instinct has been of the utmost importance in the evolution of

animals and has produced such complex and highly organized communities as those of ants and bees, and as the civilized states of mankind.

But the development of such conditions of life has brought about and has fostered a social instinct which, like the parental feelings, puts a limit on the selfishness resulting from the instinct of self-preservation, and has produced the feelings of comradeship which are characteristic of all gregarious animals. Though Darwin had already drawn attention to this fact in his chapter on the evolution of the Moral Sense in the 'Descent of Man,' it has often been lost sight of in discussions on evolution, and Kropotkin did well to draw attention, in his

'Mutual Aid in the Animal Kingdom,' to the co-operation existing among many kinds of animals. Such combination, originally for protective purposes, has led even among animals to deeds of heroism, some of which are recounted by Darwin, and among men they have culminated not only in feelings of patriotism but in that brotherly love which was taught by Christ and which we regard as one of the highest Christian virtues; nor need we regard it as less divine because of its origin in the social instincts of animals.

But our behaviour is not purely instinctive. Man is a reasoning as well as a gregarious animal, and though his feelings may have their foundation in certain emotions produced by the instinct of self and racial pre-

servation, yet his actions are now largely determined by a code of morals belonging to the race or society in which he finds himself placed. The nature of this communal moral sense is discussed by Hobhouse in his 'Morals in Evolution,' and by Westermark in the 'Origin and development of Moral Ideas.' Both authors agree in their recognition of the social instincts of animals as the foundation upon which human morality has been built up, and they see the distinction between the moral actions of man and the non-moral impulses of animals, in the power of framing general conceptions with which man is endowed and which makes him able to formulate rules of conduct. In the case of savage races some of their customary

practices may appear to us as far from moral, enjoining as they often do infanticide or cruelty and treachery to enemies; yet they represent the collective morality of a primitive people and are in harmony with the instinct of race preservation. Communal morals, enjoining honesty and justice among members of the tribe or race, mutual aid in times of need, and regulations as to marriage are obviously essential to the maintenance of the community, as much as are the social instincts of the animals. Human morality is however indelibly associated with the mental development of the human race and advances step by step as the latter progresses. Thus while we find in primitive races a moral code governing the conduct of the individuals,

we see no indication of moral ideals until a much higher stage of civilization is reached, when with the further development of the moral consciousness of man, philosophers and religious teachers not merely lay down laws of moral conduct, but hold up ethical ideals as the final aim of human morality. At this point we seem to have come to the last stage in the conditions making for moral progress. At all events they are the conditions obtaining here and now, and it may be well to consider what is the effect of definite moral precept and practice on the moral character of the individual or the moral advance of the community.

There is a feeling in some quarters that moral teaching and personal rectitude is of no

permanent value to the community, that the individual may be improved, but that such improvement leaves no impression on the offspring, who inherit moral qualities, good or bad, with which their parents were originally endowed. This belief which strikes at the progressive usefulness of all educational work, has grown out of the idea that the Darwinian theory of evolution has disproved the inheritance of acquired characters, which was one of the main assumptions of Lamarck's theory of evolution. Darwin, it is true, laid the greatest emphasis in his theory of evolution on the spontaneous variations which are known to occur so frequently and can be proved to be transmitted. At the same time he became more and more impressed by the

enormous effect of surrounding conditions on plant and animal life, and also by the many instances of changes produced in the offspring of parents exposed to altered conditions of environment.[1] In his book on 'The Variation of Animals and Plants under Domestication,' which appeared nine years after the publication of the 'Origin of Species,' Darwin included a chapter in which he elaborated his hypothesis of pangenesis, a theory according to which the reproductive cells received protoplasmic particles from all the cells of the body, so that changes in the latter, the somatic cells, would become impressed upon the egg cell from which the new individual was to be developed.

[1] See 'Life and Letters,' vol. iii. p. 159.

This theory, which was advanced to explain the transmissibility of acquired characters, was worked out in more detail by De Vries (Intracellulare Pangenesis, Jena, 1889), and Haeckel adopted a similar theory (Die Perigenesis der Plastidule, Berlin, 1876) to account for the same phenomenon. Even Weismann, who has been the staunchest upholder of the early segregation of the germ plasm and the non-inheritance of acquired characters, admits that 'we are driven to the conclusion that the ultimate origin of hereditary individual differences lies in the direct action of external influences upon the organism.'

At all events we are correct in asserting that the Darwinian theory of evolution does

not exclude the possibility of the inheritance of acquired character. It may be urged that moral teaching does not necessarily involve the acquisition of a new character; but a moral training, whether due to the influence of teacher or parent, or self-imposed, if it involves the frequent performance of moral acts, so that they become a habit, must be analogous in the moral world to the effect of external conditions upon the physical organism.

That actions repeatedly performed become a habit is true of all living organisms. Francis Darwin has in the case of plants proved experimentally by stimulating at frequent and definite intervals certain motile organs, that the rhythm artificially induced

is continued for some little time when stimulation is stopped. This 'unconscious memory' seems a general phenomenon of organic life and has been accepted as such by Hering and Samuel Butler. More recently Semon has dealt in a detailed manner with the biological aspect of this 'Mneme,' and brings forward a considerable body of evidence to prove that every stimulus produces besides the visible and temporary effect an invisible but permanent effect upon the living substance of the organism. This lasting change or engramme is added to each time a certain action is taken, and the effect of surrounding conditions, acting by a succession of stimuli, accumulates in the individual and is handed on to poster-

ity in ever-increasing amount. Thus Mneme becomes a conserving principle, storing up the lifelong experiences, and is an important factor in producing progressive changes of living organisms. Francis Darwin in his presidential address to the British Association at Dublin, declared himself an adherent of Semon's views, and Haeckel has recently expressed his belief that it constitutes the most valuable amplification of Darwin's theory of selection.

If we may apply, as I think we are justified in doing, these principles to the world of morals, Semon's theory would indicate that repeated moral acts done under the stimulus of will power, or even in obedience to command, not only become a habit in the indi-

vidual, but that they produce some permanent change in his nature, which is handed on from generation to generation and to which each descendant can add his quota. According to this view, which is in full consonance with Darwin's own theory and belief, the moral progress of the individual due to his successful struggles against temptation must be considered to be both a personal and a general advance, as the moral force represented by each act is preserved as a lasting effect upon the individual and handed on to posterity. Thus the law of the conservation of energy, which governs the physical forces of the universe, would have its counterpart in the world of morals.

But if this view of the cumulative effect

of our moral actions is true, how comes it that moral progress is so slow. For though every one will admit that we have made some advances, yet they seem comparatively slight, considering that for close upon two thousand years the ethical teaching of Christianity has been closely associated with our Western civilization. Undoubtedly some influences must have been at work to retard the advance towards a more general realization of our moral ideals.

One factor was probably the restraining force of racial instinct. While the primitive moral codes enjoined certain lines of conduct in the interest of the particular tribe or community, an antagonistic instinct towards other races was inbred in human nature, and

is not easily overcome by an ethical conception of the brotherhood of man. Though the narrower clannish instinct has become widened to a national patriotism, the fellow-feeling of mankind has not yet been extended much beyond the confines of each country. The difficulty has lain in the fact that Christian ethics, with their wider conception of the relationship of man to man, from the outset took no direct cognizance of national feelings and so were primarily antagonistic to a national government.

It is this difficulty to reconcile the orthodox methods of government founded on physical force and the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount, which has led some of the followers of Nietzsche to the conclusion that

some at all events of the Christian virtues are a hindrance to the development of a virile race and a dominant power. But it has yet to be shown that a truly Christian character is deficient in courage or manliness; while on the other hand we have many instances in history of the fall of warlike nations, when sunk in moral corruption.

We read in the 'Descent of Man' that 'As man advances in civilization, and small tribes are united into larger communities, the simplest reason would tell each individual that he ought to extend his social instincts and sympathies to all the members of the same nation, though personally unknown to him. This point being once reached, there is only an artificial barrier to prevent his

sympathies extending to men of all nations and races.' Thus Darwin himself indicates the future breaking down of the artificial barrier of nationality by the slowly growing perception of the solidarity of the human family. The moral teaching of Christ on this point, and the aims and hopes of those of us who work in the interests of 'peace on earth and goodwill towards men,' are in no wise opposed to the Darwinian view of the ultimate relationship of man to man.

Another factor which has, I believe, been operative in retarding our moral progress is the detrimental effect of the artificial environment which we have created for ourselves. Darwin has shown us the enormous modifying power of artificial surroundings

(including food) upon plants and animals under domestication. Civilized man is in no way exempt from these influences. We are all aware of the deleterious effect upon the physical well-being of the community of the crowded and artificial life of our large towns. From what I have said above it is obvious that the constant and continuous effect of bad air, insufficient or unsuitable food, and undue excitement, must ultimately cause the physical deterioration with which we are so familiar in the case of the poorer town dwellers. Nor is the moral atmosphere much better. Intemperance, self-indulgence, and cruelty are, alas, too prevalent and are responsible for moral deterioration of individuals and a weakening of the character

of their children. Luckily our eyes have been opened both to the physical and moral aspect of our artificial surroundings, and we have it in our power to remedy to a large extent the evils that have grown up with the material advance of our civilization. Besides the modifying effect of environment a selective factor of some importance has been brought into play in civilized communities which is not without a serious import. The economic struggle for existence which operates in our midst cannot be considered altogether favourable to the selection and development of altruistic principles in man. The substitution of a greater amount of co-operation or of a better organized system of production and distribution, free

from wasteful competition with its attendant evils, would, I feel sure, beneficially affect the moral progress of the community.

And now let us pass on to consider the bearing of the Darwinian theory of evolution on religious progress. In no realm of thought has the theory of evolution met with greater opposition than in theology, and yet it has undoubtedly been of great influence in stimulating theological research and inquiry. Not only has it necessitated a closer and more critical study of the Bible, but the genetic view of theology has called forth the study of comparative religions, which have been investigated largely from an evolutionary point of view. This has been undertaken in some cases by anthro-

pologists such as Frazer and Tylor, and their investigations of the earlier beliefs have undoubtedly helped forward the study of the history of religions.

This new knowledge has taught us that religions like species have not been created suddenly, but have been evolved gradually, and that even those which are closely associated with the names of great religious teachers are built up on a basis which is the product of ceaseless growth and change, and that the older beliefs have often affected and retarded the development of the newer religions.

To study the beginnings of religion we cannot, as in the case of morals, go back to some animal instinct. Even the dimmest

flickerings of religious light presuppose a thinking individual, and as we find practically some form of belief in the supernatural in all savage races, we may presume that it springs from a common necessity of all thinking individuals to speculate about their person and their surroundings and about life and the hereafter. In all savage races the earliest manifestation of a religious belief seems to be some form of animism with its accompanying magic and witchcraft. Varied as it is in different races and different climes, such belief attributes to the natural objects and animals which surround man some ghost or spirit like that of the observer himself. This may possibly be an expression of his desire for comradeship, and so have its

roots like primitive moral emotions in the social instincts of man. This animism and even the later stage of polytheism is as yet essentially non-moral, and its rites performed by the wizard or medicine-man are of a social rather than an ethical nature. The point of transition from animism to polytheism is generally ill-defined. In the latter stage of belief either certain or all the spirits are no longer the spirits of a particular object or animal, but merely take up their abode in these and become somewhat insensibly generic deities rather than specific spirits. Thus the tree becomes again a 'lifeless and inert mass,' and the spirit, 'ceasing to be the tree soul, becomes a forest god.' This change is accompanied by the growth of

myths relating to the lives of gods and heroes, though even among the savage races imagination is active and indulges in myths connected with the habits and characteristics of animals or in explanation of natural phenomena.

This polytheistic stage of early civilizations is at first quite innocent of ethical teaching; the gods indeed have all the faults and frailties of mankind, both physical and moral. They live and die, but are capable of resurrection, as in the case of Adonis and Attis, the gods typifying the seasons and vegetation, and are subject to passions such as jealousy, revenge, and hatred.

Yet even at an advanced stage of polytheism we find considerable admixtures of

animism. Thus in Egypt the hawk-headed figure of Horus represents the combination of the worship of the Sun-god and the earlier worship of the Hawk; and the gods and goddesses of Greece had their favourite attendant animal, symbolic of each particular deity, and magical rites were still observed. As civilization advanced a tendency is noticed of one or other of the gods to assume the ascendancy over the others. These may become subsidiary but still important deities, as in Greece and Rome, or they may be combined together with the principal god, a local trinity or triad. This was the case in Egypt, where the chief or nome god of one district was associated with a wife and son.

The difficulty of keeping the identities of these three personalities distinct led to much confusion, so that in the end the father and the son came to be regarded as two aspects of the same god uniting in his own person degrees of relationship mutually exclusive of each other in a human family.

Even in the comparatively typical polytheism of the Babylonians, a particular deity became the chief god of a definite town or district, and one saw the approach to a local monotheism. Not that the supreme god ever became the sole god, 'beside whom there is none other,' but he overshadowed and often incorporated in whole or in part the other deities. The importance of the

development of monotheism seems to lie in the different relationship between the worshipper and God. In monotheism the deity becomes the king or ruler of heaven and earth, the Lord, the King of kings, the Creator, the Saviour, all of which names for instance were given to the great god Marduk of the Babylonians. This attitude indicates a new relationship between man and God, his King and Maker. Man is responsible to God, who is the protector of moral order as well as the dispenser of physical well-being, for his conduct; and so ethical codes become intertwined with the religious ideas and religious worship. Such codes, of great value as affecting the words, actions, and conduct of the believers, are to be found in

the Egyptian Book of the Dead and in the Babylonian Incantation tablets—

> He has offended his god,

say the latter.

> He has said evil things.
> He has said impure things.
> He has allowed unjust things to be said.
> He has made a judge take a bribe.
> He has oppressed weakness.
> . . . . . .
> He has said yes for no.
> No for yes.
> He has used false weights.
> . . . . . .
> He has shed his neighbour's blood,

and so forth.

For such direct ethical teaching we look in vain in the lower stages of religious belief, though we find magical doctrines of punishment for grosser crimes even among races devoted to pure animism.

The purer the monotheistic views became, and the stronger and more important became the ethical teachings of these religions. Thus we find the Jewish laws promulgated by Moses, when serving 'a God of truth and without iniquity,' though the attribute of jealousy is an indication of the struggle of the Jewish monotheism with prevailing polytheism of the surrounding countries, and particularly of Egypt and Babylon, both of which, owing to the prolonged sojourn of the Jews in these countries, have had a powerful influence on the Jewish religion, and are probably accountable for the retention of many relics of the magical practices, such as those of sacrifice, etc.

The teaching of Christ marked a further

advance in the conception of God. The spiritual takes the place of the anthropomorphic aspect, and this the teaching of Christ has in common with that of Zoroaster in Persia and Buddha in India. The condemnation of sacrifices and burnt offerings by Buddha and Christ indicates their desire to lay stress on the spiritual relationship between man and God.

But each of these three formations or reformations of religion seems to have been in advance of the general mental and psychological development of the time, and could not therefore remain at the spiritual level of its founder. All three became tinged with certain aspects or remnants of the preceding beliefs, became coloured with tradition and

overloaded with ritual; and indeed unless such changes had taken place, these religions would not have survived very long. They had to adapt themselves to their surroundings or cease to exist, and the more adaptable they were the more successful they became.

Asia Minor, where the early growth of the Christian religion took place, was particularly fertile in ancient forms of belief. The widespread Mithras worship may have coloured the traditions concerning the birth of Christ, for the birth of the Persian Sun-god was first observed at dawn by shepherds keeping watch in the fields. The very prevalent cult of Attis and Adonis, with its belief in a resurrection of this god of seasons,

may very likely have been the origin of the expectancy of Christ's resurrection.

The triune nature of God has its analogy in the Isis-Osiris and Horus worship in Egypt and Rome, and its origin if not in this comparatively temporary phase of religion, must be due to the more general practice of uniting deities into godheads which marks the passage from polytheism to monotheism. The asceticism of later Christianity and the institution of monks may indicate, according to Voller, a subsequent Buddhist's influence, while some of the ethical conceptions of Christianity became tinged with influences from the later Stoics.

Thus Christianity, arising in a region peculiarly rich in traditional theology, was

able to assimilate from the various sources and adapt itself to the religious requirements of Jew and Gentile, of the philosopher and the uneducated, and herein lay no doubt the secret of its marvellous growth in places so unlike in their civilization and in the character of the people as Rome and Britain.

Nor has it remained uniform throughout its course, but has become split up into many sects and varieties of belief suited to peculiar racial and national characteristics or to different stages of mental evolution.

The vitality and adaptability of Christianity, as exemplified by its power of reformation from time to time, and by the variations in the belief and organization of its innumerable denominations, leads one to

expect that it will continue to adapt itself to the intellectual progress of mankind. Unless it can do this there is a danger that it may ultimately become discarded as a 'creed outworn.' For many of the beliefs and rites which have become incorporated into the fabric of Christianity, arising, as the study of comparative religions has shown us, from ancient polytheistic ideas and magical practices, though they gave strength to the early spread of Christianity and satisfied the mind of man in mediæval times, are undoubtedly unsuited to the mental enlightenment of to-day, as is shown by the fact that orthodox Christianity is losing hold of the educated classes of many countries. This is particularly the case

where the dominant form of the Christian religion is the Roman Catholic Church, which Wendt has aptly described as a veritable encyclopædia of religions, so richly is it blended with ancient beliefs and rites suited to early stages in the mental evolution of mankind.

The Reformation, a living proof of the power of the Christian religion to adapt itself to the advance in the mental enlightenment of its believers, was also an expression of the desire to divest Christianity of some at all events of the pagan accretions, such as the miraculous nature of the sacrament, and of laying emphasis on the spiritual nature of religious ceremonies. But becoming bound by new creeds of its own and retaining

many ancient beliefs and ceremonies that had grown up round the teaching of Christ, Protestantism, as exemplified by its most powerful forms — Lutheranism, Calvinism, and the Church of England—will probably not welcome the further changes which will be necessary to the evolution of a Christianity helpful and acceptable to an advancing humanity.

As in the case of organic life, the over-elaborated forms have from time to time died out and have been supplanted by descendants of simpler and more plastic organization, so I believe the Christian Church of the future must be evolved from denominations which are bound by no creed, but which, accepting the spiritual and ethical

teaching of Christ, believe that the human mind has its divine inspiration, and that the truths which it perceives are in harmony with the eternal laws.

We members of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches have therefore a great responsibility laid upon us, not only in the maintenance and spread of our own denomination, but also in the support we give to the spiritual development of other denominations, and indeed of other religions if they are suited to the spiritual progress of other races of mankind. In both these directions the British and Foreign Unitarian Association has I know been actively at work. It has helped and fostered the growth of Unitarian and Free

Christian congregations at home and abroad, and it has welcomed here and supported in India representatives of the Brahmo Samaj, that progressive body of theists, who stand in the same relationship to the orthodox faith of India as we do to the Roman Catholic Church. I would therefore wish God-speed to the efforts of this Association, and I do so with confidence and hopefulness, for it seems to me that these simpler beliefs must represent the real line of evolutionary advance of religion, because they are more in harmony with the progressive development of the human mind.

One question remains to be asked and if possible to be answered. We have seen how the moral nature of man, with its roots in

the social instincts, which he shares with the higher animals, became influenced by social custom, and developed at first independently of any religious belief. Only at a later stage of evolution did ethical teaching become an integral part of the higher monotheistic forms of religion, and thus moral progress was accelerated and morality strengthened by receiving its authority from God rather than custom. Is it possible that in the far future ethics may again become separated from religion; that a more advanced civilization than our own may retain the ethical teaching of Christ whilst relinquishing all forms of religion? This question may, I think, be answered from our knowledge of the origin of religions in primitive times. The uni-

versality of some form of religious belief is I am sure an index that it represents a psychological need of mankind, and as the constitution of man is not likely to be changed in such a fundamental character by any advance in his mental evolution, there will continue to persist this spiritual need for personal relationship with the Divine, based as it may ultimately be on a desire for sympathy and communion which may have been engendered by the social instincts of mankind.

Nor does this naturalistic explanation of the religious feelings of man in any way run counter to the idea of the existence of a divine spirit in human nature. The gradual evolution of the universe is the outward

expression of the creative mind, and every part of it bears therefore the divine attributes of orderliness and progress, whether we are dealing with its inorganic constituents or its organic members. The less material and the more spiritual these latter become, the more they reflect the divine purpose, and thus in their highest ethical and religious manifestations they bear the greatest resemblance to and exhibit the closest relationship with their Maker. The soul of man is indeed

Haunted for ever by the eternal mind.

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